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ABSTRACT

The booklet describes the Parents Alliance Employment Project, a program to provide job development, job placement, and job coaching to persons with intellectual disabilities in the DuPage County, Illinois, area. The first four sections provide an introduction, explain the program's philosophy, describe the population served by the project, and report on progress in the area of benefits (especially as new federal legislation has decreased the risk of workers losing Social Security benefits). Section V looks at the project's organizational structure, with information on the roles of employment specialists, the Project Director, the Board of Directors and Advisory Committee, and the role of employers and the local labor market. The next section examines the technology of employment procedures, with information on informal assessment, the job plan, job development, placement, and coaching. Successes of the project are reported in terms of funding sources and staff expansion, placement numbers (more than 100 placements in the project's 5 years of operation), types of jobs, and networking. The final section identifies future challenges in the areas of independent living, independent transportation, leisure education, and placements in full-time employment. (DB)

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Parents Alliance Employment Project

MOVING AHEAD WITH INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT

— AN UPDATE —

Project Booklet
of
Parents Alliance Employment Project

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Marjorie Lee
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Third Edition
September 1990

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Each edition of the Parents Alliance Employment Project booklet marks stages of progress within the organization.

The recent changes include funding from three major sources. The grants which make possible the full range of employment services for persons with disabilities have been provided by:

-- Illinois Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)

-- Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA)

-- Illinois Department of Public Aid (DPA)

Additional funds for supplementary activities have come from:

-- Illinois Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities

-- Metropolitan Insurance Foundation

-- St. James Council, Knights of Columbus

-- Father Boecker Council, Knights of Columbus

Staff expansion has been a major landmark. The 1990 staff includes:

David Verban	-- Project Director
Bart Misantoni	-- DORS Employment Specialist
Ann Edelbrock	-- DORS Employment Specialist
Colleen Hunter	-- JTPA Employment Specialist
Erin Dunsmuir	-- DPA Employment Specialist
JoAnne Fortson	-- DPA Employment Specialist
Rosalie Young	-- Office Manager

The Board of Directors has been expanded to represent special categories in the areas of disabilities, education and business. Members of the Board of Directors are:

Linda Colson (chairperson)	-- Coordinator with School Association for Special Education in DuPage (SASED)
Dan Collins	-- Illinois Department of Employment Security
Robert Edwards	-- Bellcore
Kathleen Glotzbach	-- Parent Representative
Marjorie Lee	-- Parent Representative & Fiscal Monitor
Sally Vernon	-- National Louis University

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I. INTRODUCTION

Integrated employment with support is no longer in its infancy. It has moved on to a mature state where basic issues have changed, new challenges have been identified and the technology of implementation has become more standardized.

The earliest basic issue was, of course, whether persons with intellectual disabilities should have the opportunity to work in real jobs outside of segregated workshops. This question has been answered with a resounding "yes", and from there the challenge has been to make the promise of integrated employment a reality.

Some of the subsequent issues within the employment arena were: employer willingness to hire workers with disabilities, appropriate job matches, co-worker interactions and meeting target numbers required by funding sources. Service providers now are comfortable in recognizing that "all of the above" can be and have been accomplished.

More pressing issues now include: progress from "just jobs" to careers; moving from part-time work to full-time work with related benefits; accessing appropriate transportation that will make the worker more independent; reaching out to serve persons with more severe disabilities; and moving into related services to improve the quality of life for every worker.

The quality of life issues include independent or semi-independent living arrangements, leisure time activities and, hopefully, friends. Even though the Parents Alliance Employment Project is funded only to provide employment services, the staff is aware of these quality of life elements and cognizant that networking is a key to linking to the additional services needed.

This booklet will summarize some of the past accomplishments of the Parents Alliance Employment Project and discuss current activities and raise some issues which may affect the future of employment for persons with disabilities.

II. A SOUND PHILOSOPHY SHAPES HISTORY

The Parents Alliance Employment Project has the unique distinction of having been established as a parent initiated program. It is no longer important to dwell on the three years of all-volunteer activity with no significant money available, but it is important to give credit to the vision of those pioneers. It is also important to recognize that the small but dedicated group was able to learn the art of grant writing, obtain funds and establish a fully professional staff of employment specialists appropriately educated to provide the three-pronged goal identified as job development, job placement and job coaching.

The consistent philosophy behind all of this was the deep-seated belief that persons with intellectual and learning disabilities have the same rights as all citizens -- specifically the right to be a part of the community in every way, including employment in regular business establishments working side by side with nondisabled peers.

Individuals were placed on jobs based on skills and interests in settings employing nonhandicapped persons. The pattern of individual placements was determined to be appropriate from the very beginning. The intent of individual placements is to maximize the possibility of interaction with co-workers and to eliminate the possibility of developing a segregated unit within a community business environment.

III. THE POPULATION SERVED BY THE PARENTS ALLIANCE EMPLOYMENT PROJECT

To qualify for services from the Parents Alliance Employment Project an applicant must meet specific eligibility criteria related to specific funding sources. The primary requirement is an identifiable disability. Persons with intellectual or learning disabilities might best describe the applicants that have been served effectively by the expertise of the current professional staff. In some instances, a physical disability is a secondary factor.

During the first three years of funding the disability was the only eligibility requirement. The funding at that time emphasized time limited support. This meant that the worker had to be capable of a relatively high degree of independence on the job within a relatively short period of time. However, the contact was maintained and support service could be reinstated whenever a problem arose or upgrading required training for new skills or added responsibility.

Newer funding sources added to the project have brought additional eligibility requirements -- primarily economic requirements based on recent earnings or being a recipient of Supplemental Security Income.

One goal of providing employment is to develop a greater degree of economic independence. Ultimately this means decreased reliance on public benefit programs.

During the first years of the project's existence the average age of workers placed was twenty-four. This demographic characteristic reflected the fact that the project was initiated for families who had resisted workshop placement for their sons and daughters and had chosen unemployment or their own family efforts at job seeking until this new option was created providing community based employment.

This population seems to have been absorbed and the registry of applicants now reflects a younger population just leaving the public school special education programs. This trend has triggered a more structured pattern of transition, linking the Parents Alliance Employment Project more closely with staff of special education programs.

One undercurrent of concern that surfaces when analyzing the population served is that there continues to be many people in sheltered environments who are not seeking community placements.

What is the reason for this?

It is recognized that the agencies providing sheltered employment also are providing community placements. However, the workshops and day activity programs continue to exist.

There has been nationwide emphasis for supported employment. The intent has been to provide jobs in the normal business community. "Systems change" should mean bringing workers from sheltered environments into community jobs.

Although recent statistics indicate an increase in community placements, the statistics also indicate stablized numbers in the workshops. The world still is waiting for a significant movement of people from segregated workshops into community jobs.

IV. PROGRESS IN THE AREA OF BENEFITS

For many years families have been reluctant to risk the loss of Social Security or Supplemental Security Income benefits and the related health insurance coverage. The legislation covering these benefits has changed drastically in recent years in an effort to encourage people with disabilities to enter the labor force without fear of losing benefits until secure in their employment. Legislative changes related to these benefits have made an impact on parental attitudes toward community based employment for their sons and daughters.

The risk factor for Social Security recipients has been minimized in 1990 through changes in the trial work period earnings and the higher ceiling on substantial gainful activity dollar amounts. In addition, the period of extended eligibility after benefits terminate allows for continuation of Medicare coverage and reinstatement for monthly benefits if unemployment occurs. Supplemental Security Income for several years has provided safeguards by retaining "eligibility" so that benefits can be resumed at any time.

These assurances need no further description here. However, there is a need to encourage families to develop a better understanding of the benefits by maintaining contact with their local Social Security office. Communication and sharing of information are crucial in order to provide assurances to families in relation to finances and the necessary health insurance coverage for the family member with a disability.

V. PARENTS ALLIANCE EMPLOYMENT PROJECT ORGANZATION STRUCTURE

A. Role of Employment Specialists

Direct services are provided by a staff of "employment specialists", who come to the project with a variety of backgrounds. Generally required, however, are a bachelor's degree in special education, rehabilitation or a related field and experience working with people with disabilities. In addition, the ability to communicate clearly and effectively is essential, as employment specialists also regularly engage in activities typically associated with sales or public relations.

Because the position of employment specialist is a complex one, it is important to maintain a staff of well qualified professionals who can function effectively as both job developer and job coach. In a field where high staff turnover is a common problem, an organization must do everything possible to retain qualified employment specialists. By offering a fair salary and benefit package and an attractive work environment, the project has been able to maintain better-than-average staff continuity.

The Parents Alliance Employment Project has developed a structure identified as "employment specialist modules", in which each staff member is responsible for providing all services to a specific list of applicants. This pattern requires the employment specialist to handle everything from the initial application for services to the placement, training and follow-up for each applicant. The module structure automatically developed from the earliest stages of the project. As the program moved from its early volunteer stage of job development and placement, the earliest grant seeking efforts were geared toward obtaining just one salaried staff position that would encompass the full spectrum of job development, placement and training.

With this accomplished and one position functioning effectively, the next major change was to request a second comparable position. The decision was made at that time to maintain the approach that each staff person was an almost autonomous unit carrying full responsibility for each applicant from the beginning to the completion of all steps in the employment procedures.

It soon became apparent that the best method for staff expansion was to obtain a mixture of funding sources with the arrangement that each funding source would provide one or two staff modules. The financial structure was easy to maintain. Each grant covered salary, fringes and travel for the selected staff person. Overhead costs were prorated across the board with a share coming from each funding source according to the number of positions funded.

The autonomy of each employment specialist does not eliminate teamwork, however, and good interaction among staff members is very evident within the organization. Good supervision by the project director is also very evident. Weekly staff meetings and daily contact within the office provide opportunities for sharing labor market information, strategies for job development and solutions to issues which have arisen while job coaching.

B. Role of the Project Director

The role of the project director has many facets. Most globally, the director must implement the policies and procedures established by the Board of Directors. Staff supervision is a major part of this responsibility. It is important to work closely with the employment specialists to ensure that services are provided in a consistent, high-quality manner which maintains the basic philosophy of the organization. Good relationships among staff not only create happier work days, but also assure successful completion of the project's objectives.

Because of the small size of the organization, the project director "wears many hats." A list of responsibilities include: seeking new funding sources, writing grant proposals, preparing budgets, implementing objectives within budget limits, preparing monthly and quarterly reports, maintaining communication with funding sources, networking with other agencies, participating in task forces and committees, making presentations to interested groups, attending and presenting at professional conferences, writing dissemination materials, preparing publicity releases and being available to discuss everyday activities with staff members or to help solve challenging problems of coaching in the job sites. This in addition to providing direct service to his/her own group of applicants.

C. Role of Board of Directors and Advisory Committee

The Board of Directors has been created to maintain the philosophy of the project and to determine the policies basic to the operation of the program. The members of the Board have been selected to represent specific categories -- two are from the field of special education, two are parents of persons with disabilities, two are from government agencies related to employment and one is from the area of private business. The expertise of each Board Member brings together a blend of knowledge and experience that contributes to the ongoing success of the project.

The Advisory Committee is a group comprised of representatives of special education programs, adult service providers, employers and parents of consumers.

The Advisory Committee meetings are open forums for discussion of services, sharing of information related to unmet needs and the development of linkages to meet these needs. The group provides input to the Parents Alliance Employment Project staff and also provides a wonderful channel of public relations to the widespread community which they represent.

D. Role of Employers and Local Labor Market

Obviously the employers in the local area are among the most valued members of the team which is working together to provide appropriate employment services for persons with disabilities.

The employment activities of the project occur primarily in DuPage County, Illinois. Fortunately the economic factors in this geographic area work to the advantage of the program. Economic conditions are good. It is an area of relatively high incomes and low unemployment rates. The population is over 750,000 and continuing to expand. New business development is very much in evidence with the construction of numerous shopping centers and related services.

There is relatively little competition for entry level positions that often provide initial opportunities for individuals with disabilities. As in other parts of the country, the teenage population is reduced in numbers as compared with previous generations. Therefore, employers are actively seeking workers who are interested in filling service jobs and other entry level positions.

In addition, employers seem to be extremely receptive to workers with disabilities -- some because of a new understanding of disabilities and some because it is good business. Many corporations have come to recognize the work potential of this population. Many also appreciate the benefit of Targeted Jobs Tax Credit which reduces the tax liability of the business firm for the first year wages paid to each person with a disability employed by the company.

Co-workers interactions contribute to the success of employment because co-workers must provide natural supports for the workers after the support of the job coach is reduced.

Mainstreaming or integration within the schools in recent years has contributed greatly to the widespread acceptance of persons with intellectual and learning disabilities in normal adult settings within the community. It is not yet a perfect world but progress in acceptance is apparent.

VI. TECHNOLOGY OF EMPLOYMENT PROCEDURES

A. Informal Assessment

New applicants come to the project from a variety of sources. Referrals are accepted from the local vocational rehabilitation agency, special education programs, other service providers and directly from applicants and their families. When an applicant is determined to be appropriate for project services and meets the eligibility requirements of the project funding sources, the assessment process begins.

New applicants are not required to complete formal vocational evaluations or "job readiness training" before being served. Rather, employment specialists use a unique informal assessment to help them gather relevant information about an applicant's abilities and interests. The applicant is first interviewed, usually at the project office, which is centrally located on the campus of the local community college. The employment specialist will also talk to other significant people in the applicant's life including immediate family and close friends, former teachers (particularly vocational teachers), and other service

providers. The goal of this information gathering is simply to "get to know" the applicant, to compile a picture of his/her experience, abilities, interests and support needs.

Often the most important part of the assessment process occurs after the initial interview, when the employment specialist will simply observe the applicant in several community settings. The project has developed a brief assessment form which helps staff use these observations to answer questions about the applicant's functional skills (e.g. money handling, reading), social skills and interests and leisure activities.

B. Job Plan

Once the informal assessment is completed, the employment specialist must translate the findings into a specific plan for developing a job. The goal is to match the characteristics of the applicant with potential employment in three general categories: job tasks, environmental factors and location. The time spent on creating a detailed job plan will vary based on an applicant's actual work experience and abilities. Generally, the less experience an applicant has had in community settings and the more support he requires, the greater the need for a well conceived job plan.

As mentioned, a good job match should be based on three general areas. First, the specific tasks to be performed should match the applicant's physical and intellectual abilities. Is the applicant best suited for clerical work, such as filing? To what extent are reading skills required for a task? Does the applicant work best on a task that is highly repetitive, thus facilitating better learning and retention of the task? A multitude of factors may be considered in the process of identifying appropriate job tasks, including the applicant's preferences, motor skills, academic skills, and any physical or medical limitations. As always, these factors should not be used to limit or eliminate opportunities, but to develop ideas and opportunities based on the applicant's strengths rather than his/her limitations.

A second area for job matching is the general work environment. Social and other work related factors should be considered in deciding what environment will provide the best support and reinforcement for the applicant, and thus the greatest opportunity for success. Environmental factors include the size of the work area, the number of co-workers who will be close to the applicant, the noise level and the social and behavioral expectations of workers in a particular area. As a simple example, if an applicant enjoys and is motivated by interactions with others, a job requiring such interactions as part of the normal work routine should be sought. Conversely, some applicants may do better if social interactions occur primarily at specified break times. A good match between an applicant's personality and the work environment should minimize distractions and help the applicant concentrate on learning and performing his/her tasks.

Finally, the location of the applicant's residence and accessibility to transportation is important for obvious reasons. The location of a job should allow the applicant to travel between home and work with maximum independence and reliability. Walking, riding public transportation and participating in carpools with co-workers are all appropriate modes of tranportation which may be used by people with and without disabilities. In some areas, specialized transportation for people with disabilities may be available. Cost, reliability and alternatives for integrated transportation should be carefully considered before utilizing specialized options.

C. Job Development

Once a job plan is completed the search for a job may begin. The goals in the job plan should guide the job development process and deviations from the plan should occur only when absolutely necessary. It must be remembered that job development is merely a means to an end -- the desired end being a successful job placement.

There are a number of ways to approach job development, any one of which can be successful. Each employment specialist tends to develop his/her own style based on unique abilities and preferences. Some prefer a formal sales/marketing approach to job development, while others rely primarily on cold calls and informal contacts to develop job leads. Regardless of their different styles, all project staff remain focused on the applicant. All employer contacts are made with a specific applicant in mind, so that an applicant is not "forced" into a job which does not match his/her abilities and interests. This applicant-centered approach increases the likelihood of a successful worker and long term job retention.

Employer contacts are developed from a number of sources. Most job development, begins, however, with a visual survey of the geographic area near the applicant's residence. This survey should identify businesses which may have the type of jobs and environment sought for the applicant. It should also identify any public transportation routes available to the applicant. The potential job site should be relatively close to the applicant's residence and readily accessible by appropriate transportation (e.g. walking, public bus).

After completing the geographic survey, the employment specialist begins making actual contacts with employers. Initial contacts are made in person, by telephone or occasionally by letter. Generally the project staff has had the most success with in-person contacts. The type and size of the business may determine the most appropriate method. A larger business or organization with a personnel or human resources department may best be reached via telephone. Smaller businesses where owners or managers are more accessible are best approached in person.

The initial employer contact may be facilitated through the use of referrals, which may be acquired from a number of sources. Business owners or managers who have employed project applicants will often provide the names of other employers in the area who may be interested. A referral from a fellow businessperson will usually give the employment specialist additional credibility when making the first contact. Referrals may also come from other service providers, personal and professional acquaintances of project staff or from an applicant and his/her family. Of course, the simplest and most common "referral" is a "help wanted" sign or advertised job opening which may be the right job for the applicant.

The initial contact should result in an opportunity to meet with the employer to explain the services provided by the project and possible incentives for hiring a person with a disability. The first impression an employer receives is an important one. He/she must understand how job coaching is designed to maximize the abilities of a worker with a disability and minimize any additional supervisory burden on the employer.

If possible, the initial meeting should include a tour of the work environment, allowing the employment specialist to observe workers performing their jobs. The specialist looks for: jobs or parts of jobs which could be performed by an applicant, the size and layout of the work area, potential barriers to accessibility and opportunities for interactions with co-workers. Since integration and inclusion are the major goals of the project, jobs must allow workers with disabilities the opportunity to develop relationships with nondisabled co-workers. These goals are also responsible for the project's policy of making individual placements and maintaining an appropriate proportion of workers with disabilities in a work environment.

Preliminary information should be gathered during this initial meeting with the employer. The employment specialist should ask the employer to describe the types of jobs that occur within the site. Particular attention should be paid to the specific steps required to complete each work task. In addition to the specific work tasks it is also important to notice the social requirements of the workplace. The job skills and social skills should be specifically matched to the applicant's abilities. This will provide the greatest opportunity for success. Additionally,

a good job match will allow the worker to become as independent and capable as possible, thus encouraging interaction with co-workers. As the employment specialist sees work needs which could be filled by the applicant, he/she may specifically propose that the employer hire the applicant.

The results of the initial presentation and proposal will vary. Ideally, an employer is willing to hire the applicant for an existing job opening. A second possibility is that the applicant may not be quite right for the existing position, but would be capable of performing some portion of the tasks normally completed by other workers. Creating or modifying a position is often the best way to match an applicant to a job. If the employer can see that hiring the applicant for such a created position would fill an unmet need or increase the efficiency of other workers, a placement may be made.

Convincing an employer to hire an applicant for a created job often requires additional meetings and follow-up. Others in the business may need to be consulted, typical hiring procedures may need to be waived, and the employer simply may be wary of trying something different. The employment specialist may help address these concerns, offering to meet with other managers or assist in the creation of a new job description. Again, a referral from a satisfied employer can help convince the new employer to give it a try. Above all, the employment specialist must be persistent. The employer is a very busy person who may delay indefinitely the decision unless follow-up phone calls or letters are initiated by the employment specialist.

D. Placement and Coaching

An employer usually will wish to meet an applicant before making a final hiring decision, and the applicant should have an opportunity to observe the job and decide that he is interested in it. Interviews are arranged only with employers who have expressed at least a tentative willingness to hire. Though every individual is unique, many project applicants do not excel at job interviews. When this is the case, the employer must understand that the skills required in an interview may be completely unlike those needed to perform the job successfully. The employment specialist must not let a poor interview performance eliminate an opportunity for a job which is otherwise appropriate for the applicant.

Many details will need to be worked out before the applicant begins work. Issues such as a specific job description, work schedule and possible company benefits should all be discussed. The employment specialist is also an advocate and must ensure that the applicant's best interests, as well as the employer's, are met on the job. If the applicant is unable to ask the right questions about the job, then the employment specialist should do so.

The employer often has some last minute questions of his/her own which should be answered satisfactorily before employment begins. Typical points of confusion include the actual status of the applicant as an employee, the role of the employment specialist and associated liability responsibilities. Employers always are reminded that the applicant is to be hired as an employee of the business, covered by the same policies, benefits and liability insurance as any other employee.

The employment specialist, who now becomes the job coach, remains the responsibility of the Parents Alliance Employment Project and its liability coverage. In addition, the specialist will be there to teach and support the worker, and not to perform additional work for the employer.

The employment specialist (job coach) must be well prepared to teach the new worker. Usually the job coach will visit the job site to observe or actually perform the tasks for which the new worker will be responsible. The coach develops a task analysis by recording each step of the job sequence. When the worker is ready to begin, each step in the sequence is presented and the worker's performance of that step is observed and recorded. This procedure establishes a "baseline" by identifying which steps the worker can complete independently. The process of gathering baseline data varies greatly, depending on the job(s) being performed and the worker's level of ability and experience.

Once it has been determined which steps the worker cannot perform independently, decisions must be made on how to address these steps. There are several possibilities:

The targeted tasks may be further broken into smaller sub-tasks and taught, using a mode of instruction appropriate to the worker (e.g. verbal instruction, modeling, physical prompting, etc.)

The task might be adapted in one of several ways:

- the sequence of tasks may be rearranged to suit the worker better while achieving the same result;
- an adaptive tool or device may be introduced to assist the worker;
- a co-worker may be able to assist the worker with that portion of the task which the new worker cannot perform independently.

It is always desirable to try to teach the worker all skills required for the job. If, however, the time required to teach is so great that it cannot be justified by the importance of the task, an adaptation should be considered. The purpose of any adaptation should be to increase the worker's ability to work independently by lessening dependence on the job coach. Any adaptive device should be as unobtrusive as possible and should not make the job more difficult or complicated.

Data collection is an important part of the initial job coaching process. The task analysis usually forms the basis for collecting data on job performance. For each step in the job sequence, a specific and measureable performance expectation should be set, along with any cues to be given by the job coach.

Collecting data then requires a simple "yes/no" (or "+/-") indication of whether the worker met the performance criteria for each step. This method of data collection is one that is often used by the Parents Alliance staff. It provides an objective basis for judging progress made by the worker and the effectiveness of teaching techniques.

As the worker's performance improves, the role of the job coach is continually revised. The job coach always must be thinking about how to reduce his/her presence on the job without negatively affecting the worker. "Fading" is a gradual process, accompanied by careful monitoring of the worker's performance

and always done in consultation with the employer. Every effort is made to encourage and enable the employer or other employees to provide the active supervision and support required by the worker.

Even after the employment specialist has reduced or eliminated his/her physical presence on the job, contact is maintained with both worker and employer. If a situation arises requiring additional support or instruction, the employment specialist should be prepared to respond appropriately. The long-term success of the worker often depends on maintaining a link with the employment specialist. Even in situations where there is no funding for ongoing support services, the Parents Alliance Employment Project has recognized the critical need for follow-up.

VII. SUCCESSES OF THE PROJECT

A. Funding Sources and Staff Expansion

The financial growth of the Parents Alliance Employment Project may be unique or it may parallel funding patterns of comparable organizations. There appears to be value in providing information on finances for two major reasons. The first reason is that comparable programs may benefit from the experience of this project. The second reason is that major funding agencies may come to recognize more clearly the inherent difficulties in the widespread process of grant seeking. Competition for grants, the difficulty of obtaining an initial grant and the enormous amount of staff time involved in grant writing are some of the difficulties encountered if grant funding is to be the primary source of support.

The first step in establishing a free standing agency with the single objective of providing jobs in the normal business community for persons with disabilities is to have personnel available to initiate activity. In the Parents Alliance Employment Project's early stages the personnel consisted of volunteers who had the appropriate philosophy and the expertise to provide recruitment of applicants, job development with employers and the knowledge of procedures to provide financial incentives to employers through on-the-job training subsidies and Targeted Jobs Tax Credit.

Volunteers, of course, do not receive payment for their services. Therefore, the small amounts of money obtained from local philanthropic groups were utilized to provide for basic needs such as postage, stationery, printing, an answering machine and eventually a telephone line combined with free office space.

Over a three year period this program developed a track record of successful job development and enough placements to be identified as a successful program, thereby winning the confidence of a major state agency.

This initial grant provided the opportunity to hire one professional staff person and more realistically cover the overhead for an established office. In successive years two additional funding sources provided grants to the project and allowed for expansion. By 1990 the staff included a project director, five employment specialists and an office manager.

B. Placement Numbers

During the first two funded years of the project only one employment specialist was on staff. During the third and fourth years two employment specialists carried the responsibility. The increase to five positions has been very recent. In spite of the small staff size there were more than 100 placements made in the five year period of funded activity.

C. Types of Jobs

There have been a wide range of job opportunities, including the following:

-- bagging groceries in a supermarket
-- stacking diapers in a children's store
-- maintaining the cleanliness of a fast food restaurant
-- preparing food in a pizza restaurant
-- flouring chicken pieces in a fried chicken franchise
-- washing dishes with a commercial machine or manually
-- sorting checks numerically
-- collating and stapling printed materials
-- placing labels on special containers
-- tagging merchandise
-- filing documents
-- entering computer data
-- monitoring the security of fitting rooms
-- assisting in a day care center

Numerous job possibilities exist. The critical factor is an appropriate match between the employee and the job. It is important to identify the interest of the potential worker, to recognize any skills already developed, to evaluate informally the ability to learn new skills and to relate this information to a relevant job description.

As indicated in the discussion of coaching, task analysis and discrepancy analysis provide the basis for skill instruction emphasizing training to improve the areas of weakness and maintain the areas of strength. Data collection in a structured manner is crucial to provide the guidelines for adapting the instruction to meet the specific needs of the worker.

Part-time jobs and repeat placements are allowable. Part-time employment is an entering wedge into the world of work providing work skill training, social interactions and the development of stamina in the worker. Repeat placements are not only allowable but necessary -- not for everyone but for many workers. The population served during the early years of the project came up through the special education system before the era of community based instruction and related vocational training in community jobs.

Therefore, the earliest jobs in community environments served as a vocational training program for many of these individuals.

The employment specialist evaluates the mastery of skills, the work ethic of the employee and the social behaviors in the work site. This enables the trainer to determine a career pattern based on capitalizing on successes, avoiding pitfalls and seeking a later placement that would assure job retention and the potential for full-time employment with related benefits.

D. Networking

It is important for a program of integrated employment with support to develop and maintain linkages in several directions -- with programs providing comparable services, special education referral sources, adult referral agencies, funding agencies, employer groups and advocacy groups.

The methods by which networking can occur locally include:

-- professional task forces and committees
-- conference participation
-- seminars, either sponsorship or attendance
-- presentations to professional groups and parent organizations
-- publicity channels

Currently a major networking activity is an organized pattern of transition for students who are aging out of special education programs. Previously, the graduates had been accepted into the project through individual family applications. The plan now is to overlap with the educational system in a recommended transition pattern with cooperative activity between the school staff and the employment project's personnel. This provides a smooth transition and an improved awareness of the young person's abilities and interests.

During the history of the Parents Alliance Employment Project networking on a broader geographic scale has occurred through the dissemination of printed materials throughout the United States and Canada.

The first project booklet was reviewed in a national publication in 1987 at a time when integrated employment with support was relatively new. As a result of the review, hundreds of requests for the booklet were received from thirty-four states and four provinces of Canada.

The review developed a ripple effect and was repeated in numerous publications throughout the United States. The volume of requests triggered the publication of a revised edition of the project booklet. Once again hundreds

of copies were distributed -- this time in forty-three states and four provinces of Canada.

Although it is impossible to measure the value of this dissemination, it is assumed that the information about this small-scale, cost-efficient model of individual placements in the normal business community may have provided some degree of inspiration and knowledge to new programs.

VIII. FUTURE TRENDS

The primary objective of the Parents Alliance Employment Project is to provide employment services to persons with disabilities -- primarily persons with intellectual and learning disabilities.

However, many changes in quality of life result from employment in the normal business community. The staff continues to see the same wonderful side effects which were indicated in earlier studies. These include:

- -- increased self esteem
- -- improved use of transportation
- -- improved money skills
- -- awareness of appropriate grooming
- -- improved social skills and interpersonal relationships
- -- improved vocational skills and possible upgrading in employment

Additional challenges remain. Many types of activity are outside the realm of the present structure of the employment project. However, through linkages to other agencies and personal involvement with the workers with disabilities, encouragement and guidance may be provided to create additional changes in lifestyle.

At present, most of the workers are living with their parents. Initiatives are being developed within the State of Illinois and other areas to encourage independent living of varying degrees. Financial coverage for housing costs are a critical concern. Basic skills such as house cleaning, budgeting, food planning and time scheduling are essential domestic skills to be learned and practiced.

Independent transportation is another critical area that is important to each worker regardless of his/her domestic setting. Although this project does not provide mobility training, staff members encourage and advise parents about the alternatives that do exist or may be developed.

Appropriate use of leisure time needs emphasis. The development of friendships is an essential element in quality of life and is a difficult one to accomplish. Hopefully, the inclusion of people in the working life of the community may promote better opportunities for the development of true friendships.

Perhaps one of the most critical challenges is the ultimate goal of full-time employment with related benefits available from the employer for all workers with disabilities. The achievement of this goal must have the support of state agencies and service providers as well as the business community. Innovative linkages between the public and private sectors will be needed to make employment a reality for all people with disabilities who wish to work.

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